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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER DOWNPLAYS GON ENDORSEMENT OF
NORTH KOREA,S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) On May 21, the Ambassador raised with Foreign Minister Samuel Santos the Nicaraguan government's (GON) position vis a vis North Korea (DPRK), specifically noting our concern over President Ortega's recent public remarks virtually endorsing the DPRK's efforts to become a nuclear power, a position that does not help facilitate the ongoing Six-Party Talks (remarks faxed to desk on 23 May). The Ambassador referred to President Ortega's declaration that, "some (countries) arm themselves, but want to prohibit others from arming themselves in self-defense. This is not correct, this is not fair," in clear allusion to the DPRK's nuclear arms race. Foreign Minister Santos replied that President Ortega had merely recognized North Korea's right to defend itself. He then proceeded to lambaste the media for reporting only part of Ortega's remarks, leaving out the President's comments "in support of the Six-Party Talks."

¶2. (C) Comment: The GON recently upgraded its diplomatic ties with North Korea, accrediting North Korean Ambassador Jae Myong So on May 16 and hosting the DPRK's Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Hyong Jun in his three-day visit to Managua. During the Bolanos administration, Nicaragua's Ambassador in Tokyo covered North Korea, and North Korea did not maintain an embassy in Managua. We understand the North Koreans are establishing an embassy here, but according to the Foreign Ministry's Americas director, Nicaragua will not open an embassy in Pyongyang because of cost constraints. He stated that Nicaragua's embassy in Tokyo will continue covering North Korea.

¶3. (C) President Ortega's unhelpful endorsement of North Korea's nuclear arms ambitions typifies his increasingly frequent anti-U.S., pro-Venezuela, pro-rogue-state rhetoric. In essence, friends of Venezuela -- including North Korea, Iran, and Belarus -- are automatically Nicaragua's allies and must be supported publicly. On May 19, Ortega and Kim Hyon Jun committed their countries to support each other in international fora and to "cooperate in all fields." While it is true that during the accreditation ceremony Ortega remarked that Jae Myong So had informed him of North Korea's talks with China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States, he did not endorse these talks, preferring instead to

lend Nicaragua's support for North Korea's arms race -- a statement that would understandably be picked up by the media. The Japanese Ambassador told the Ambassador privately that he is "deeply concerned" by Ortega's remarks and the upgrading of DPRK relations.

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